

ADAM M HITZ

THE SPIRIT FIELD ADVENTURES: SPARK

ADAM M HITZ

PRAISE FOR ADAM M. HITZ'S
THE SPIRIT FIELD
ADVENTURES: SPARK

"This is a well-written story and the events that unfold are masterfully developed to become very clear in the reader's mind. The author does an awesome job with the point-of-view and offers vivid descriptions of scenes and characters right from the beginning." Five Star review by Ruffina Oserio for Readers' Favorite

"For great young adult fantasy, The Spirit Field Adventures: Spark by Adam M. Hitz is a wonderful story. With unique characters that have plenty to offer as individuals as well as a group, you quickly get caught up in the action and hold your breath as new challenges continually arise." Five Star review by Melinda Hills for Readers' Favorite

"The Spirit Field Adventures: Spark by Adam M Hitz is young urban fantasy with strong elements of the supernatural, a well-crafted story that is as inspiring as it is entertaining. The reader is plunged into a world where things aren't the way they seem to be." Five Star review by Christian Sia for Readers' Favorite

© 2017 Adam M Hitz All rights reserved.

This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States. Any reproduction, transmission, or distribution of the contents of this book without express permission is prohibited.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance of characters or events contained within to actual people or events is purely coincidental.

ISBN: 0692882782
ISBN 13: 9780692882788

Get up-to-date information about future books by Adam M. Hitz online:

www.spiritfieldadventures.com/
www.facebook.com/TheSpiritFieldAdventures/
www.twitter.com/Hitz_Adam

Prologue

The explosion was intense and seemed to go on forever. Nothing but bright light and heat surrounded them. They could only take in the vastness of it. How long the explosion lasted, they could not tell. The noise was all encompassing; they could not speak or think.

No one noticed when the explosion finally stopped. The aftermath of the explosion was a jumbled confusion. The silence and darkness that now surrounded them were almost as bad as the explosion had been. They could not tell where one person began and another ended.

I was the first to re-form back to myself. At first, I could not remember anything before the explosion, not even who I was. Then I was filled with life again as I started to remember. Something important had happened. But what?

That was it—we were not where we had been. This new place was strange. It felt devoid of life and happiness. Completely empty of everything but thought. I tried to move but could not. Then, a sickening realization struck me. My body was gone.

Was I dead? Was this place hell? It sure felt like it. I only felt hate and sadness around me. The memory of before was warped and twisted. Nothing could be learned from it. It was fading away. I was scared of not knowing. I wished desperately for someone to help me.

The despair kept growing around me. Then I realized that it was coming from the others. I could feel them re-forming around me. Their confused thoughts zoomed around at impossible speeds. There were so many of them. All of their bodies were gone.

This all started to feel familiar, but why? I remembered now: I had been fighting. But why? Had I been fighting the others around me? No, they were with me; for some reason, I knew

ADAM HITZ

that. We were on the same team. Something told me that I was the leader.

Why were we fighting? The answer never came. All I knew was that we had lost. We had been destroyed; why were we not dead? This place should not be real, and yet here we were.

I felt the need to know something. I asked those now re-formed around me, "How many did we lose? There should be more of us here. But we are so few in number now."

Someone tried to respond to my question. "I...w-we are dead. No, it's something else. What are we? We are here and not here at the same time. This is not right. We are not right."

Another more coherent voice spoke. "I think we lost too many. I remember that there used to be too many of us to count. We were winning. We had more; they had fewer, and then came the explosion of light. Now we are less than a fraction of what we once were."

The questions kept coming. We talked forever but got no closer to understanding. The confusion grew and grew until it became pure chaos. No one held any answers that made sense. It was driving us insane.

Then, for the first time, a new voice spoke from the void. For some reason, this new voice filled me with rage. I did not know why, but I knew that I hated him with my whole being. I wished to destroy him at any cost.

The voice spoke in a clear and intelligent way. "The universes could not live while we lived. The endless fighting and destruction was going to destroy everything and everyone. I had no choice but to bring the fighting to an end. It was the only way to save them. We have been banished to the void. This place will be our prison forever. We can never go back."

The response to his statement was violent and strong. Everyone yelled and screamed and questioned. There was no control left to us. All hope was lost, and he was to blame. No one could explain why, but we could all feel it. We all thought

of him as our betrayer. He was the wisest and the evilest one among us.

I shouted above all of the chaos. My voice carried infinitely in every direction. Everything went quiet almost instantly. The others turned their attention to me without hesitation. I was the leader through and through. My word was the law.

I would need to give them hope. I needed to do this even though I knew there was no hope left to give. "We know we did the right thing. You all know this to be true. We may not know what we did, but I feel deep down that it was the right thing to do."

I paused to let this sink in. Then I said the thing that they all wanted to hear but were afraid to hear. "The Betrayer speaks some of the truth. We are trapped in this strange place. For some reason, I know that we can never leave here. But do not be afraid of this fact. We are here together. We are stronger together than we will ever be apart."

I knew that they believed me. This was what they had wanted me to say. Now that I had given them hope, I would need to give them something more. They all wanted a sense of completion.

Then I said the thing that would win their support forever. "We have suffered more than anyone in existence and lost more than anyone ever should. I can feel deep down that our cause was just, but the others could not understand this. The Betrayer and his friends who did not cross over are the true evil ones.

"They destroyed our bodies and cast us into this void. Our suffering will be theirs too. We will make them pay. Let us make our hatred and despair forever permeate the universes. They shall suffer fates worse than ours. The reek of their suffering will nourish and sustain us. We may be gone from the universes, but we will know revenge."

Everyone exploded with excitement and happiness. All was not lost after all. They would make the others regret what they had done.

ADAM HITZ

Only one person among them was not happy: the one now known as the Betrayer. Without drawing attention to himself, he slowly moved away from the others. He knew that their hatred would spread among the worlds. War would be the only result of that hatred. He had tried to prevent this once already, but it would seem that the universes were destined to burn with their hatred after all.

They would cause untold amounts of suffering for all life. There was only one thing left to do now. He would need to share what was left of his happiness with the universes. They would need all the hope they could get. The happiness left him, and now he felt cold and alone.

The Betrayer felt only sadness and regret. He was sad that he would never feel happy again. His deepest regret was having so much blood on his hands. So many had died by his hand. He could never forgive himself for what he had done to all of those people. It had to be done, but that didn't mean that it was the just thing to do. He shrank under the weight of his sadness and wept for all eternity.

Chapter 1

Discovery

It was a cool summer morning near the end of May, and school was almost over. The Smithsonian in Washington, DC, was going to be very busy. Hundreds of students were coming from all over the country for an extended tour. One of those students was Brandon.

Brandon was twelve years old and had brown hair and blue eyes. Twenty other kids would join Brandon on this trip from his school. The students would be accompanied by their history teacher, Mr. Clark; their science teacher, Mrs. Fowler; and their biology teacher, Mr. Brunswick.

The class had spent the night traveling from Wisconsin by jet. This had been Brandon's first trip in a jet. It had been an enjoyable experience, but he couldn't wait for the start of the tour. He had spent the whole flight thinking about what the class would be doing on the field trip.

This field trip was part of a new program being tested out by Brandon's school. Talented students would be given a tour of the Smithsonian. It would be an exciting opportunity for students to develop an appreciation for the history of the world. The school believed that the inspired students would perform better.

Since the Smithsonian was such a large collection of museums, the tour would take an entire week. The students would start by exploring the natural history section. They would move on to the history of world cultures, and they would finish the week at the air and space displays. Each section would take two days to explore, and students would have a few hours of free time in each museum.

Once they finished the tour of the Smithsonian, the students would write essays about the trip. The main part of the

ADAM HITZ

essay was to explain the importance of culture throughout the world. Once the essays were finished, a contest would be held. The winner of the contest would get a cool prize.

Brandon cleared his thoughts as he walked out of the airport. The sun was blindingly bright in the parking lot, where buses were waiting. The class formed a line and boarded one of the buses.

Brandon walked down the aisle to a seat in the back. His friend Matt sat in the seat next to Brandon. Matt was a little bit shorter than Brandon was, with jet-black hair and pale-blue eyes. They said nothing to each other as the other students filed onto the bus. Once everyone sat down, the bus started to move.

The bus filled with noise as the students started to talk about what they would be doing at the museum. Matt tried to talk to Brandon for a while, but Brandon didn't feel like talking. Matt stopped trying when he noticed that Brandon wasn't talking back very much.

It was more than just the noise that was overwhelming Brandon. His classmates' emotions filled the air. Their emotions crowded Brandon's head, making it hard to think. Feeling emotions was nothing new to Brandon. Since an early age, he had been able to sense the emotions of those around him.

Brandon had never thought that this ability was anything special; he had figured that everyone could do it, so he'd never talked to anyone about it. He had grown used to it over the years and was usually able to tune it out. This time, however, the emotions felt stronger, and Brandon was having difficulty ignoring them. He was not sure why his classmates' emotions were overwhelming him.

There was only one other time in his life that he had felt someone's emotions this strongly. It had been during his first encounter with Matt. When Brandon was in first grade playing out on the playground, he had seen a kid standing alone. Brandon had never seen this kid before. He must be a new student from another school, Brandon thought.

Brandon would later learn that this new kid's name was Matt. Even though Brandon was on the other side of the playground, he could feel Matt's emotions very clearly. Matt was feeling very alone, but there was also something else buried in his feelings.

At first, Brandon could not figure out what this other emotion was. It felt familiar, but he could not figure out why. Slowly it dawned on Brandon that the underlying emotion was a cross between anger and hate. Once Brandon fully understood Matt's feelings, he had wondered if he should do something about them.

Brandon had stood frozen in place for a moment, reluctant to interfere with the feelings of someone he didn't even know. He hated to see someone feeling the way Matt was. There was only one thing that he could do. Brandon had walked up to Matt and said, "Hello, my name's Brandon. I've never seen you before. What's your name?"

For a moment, Matt had just stood there without responding. Then he began to speak in a quiet voice. "My name's Matt. I just transferred from another school." Matt had looked down at the ground after he finished speaking.

Brandon felt Matt's emotions become darker. "You seem kind of upset. Are you okay?" Brandon asked.

Matt looked up from the ground and stared angrily into Brandon's eyes. "Of course I'm upset. This school is so different from my last school. I don't know anyone here," Matt said.

Brandon had been stunned into silence by Matt's sudden outburst. He had not expected Matt to be that angry. In that moment, it became clear to Brandon that he could help Matt after all. Brandon smiled at Matt. "I had no idea that you had just transferred here. You seem like a nice kid. Do you want to be my friend?" Brandon had asked.

The anger had slowly faded from Matt's face, replaced with a look of surprise. A split second later, a large smile spread

across Matt's face. "You want to be my friend?" Matt asked. He gave Brandon a small nod a few seconds later.

Brandon had felt Matt's anger and loneliness fade away. A strong feeling of joy had replaced them. This feeling of joy was one of the strongest feelings that Brandon had ever felt from anyone. Brandon had nodded back at Matt, and the two of them had walked toward the playground. From that moment onward, they had been fast friends.

Brandon's thoughts were interrupted when Mr. Clark attempted to be heard over all the chattering students. "Everyone, listen up," he said. "We'll be arriving at the hotel in a few minutes. Make sure you grab all of your belongings before we leave the bus.

"Now, when we get there, we are going to assign each of you to groups of five or six other students of the same gender. Each group will get its own room. When you've dropped off all of your stuff in your rooms and settled in, we will then head to the hotel's cafeteria to eat breakfast.

"You will have forty-five minutes to eat before another bus will pick us up to take us to the Smithsonian to begin the first part of our tour. You will get a three-hour guided tour of the natural history section. I believe that the tour guide's name is Tom. He will be giving us the tour of every section of the museum.

"Once that's done, we'll head to lunch for forty-five minutes. Then we'll meet up with Tom to finish the last three hours of the tour. Then we'll finally go back to the hotel to have dinner. The remainder of the evening will be yours to work on your essays," Mr. Clark said; then he sat back down in his seat.

A short time later, the bus arrived at the hotel. Mr. Clark led the class into the front lobby. The three teachers started to number everyone off into groups and assign them to rooms. Brandon was put in room 318 with his friend Matt and three other kids. The others were Edward, who liked to be the center of attention; and Joe, who was the one most likely to get into trouble. The last kid was Lenard, whom Brandon did not know very well.

The hotel room had a couch and coffee table stationed in front of a TV. A hallway led to a bedroom and bathroom. There were three sets of bunk beds in the bedroom. There were also a couple of desks and chairs in the bedroom.

Brandon got one of the top bunks. Matt took the one underneath Brandon's bed. Brandon set his duffel bag down by the side of the bed. Then he went to wait in the hall for the rest of the class.

Once the students had deposited their stuff, they assembled outside of their rooms. Mr. Clark led them all back down to the lobby of the hotel. From there, they went to the cafeteria to eat breakfast.

The cafeteria was not very full at this time of day. The food smelled so good that it made their mouths water. Brandon ordered scrambled eggs with bacon and mushrooms. For a drink, he had a glass of orange juice. Matt, who was sitting next to Brandon, had an omelet with cheese and bacon and a nice, tall glass of orange juice.

As the two of them ate, they talked about the trip there. "Isn't this field trip awesome? This food is amazing, and the trip here was fun too. I've only been on a plane once before, and that was when I was young, so I don't really remember it very much," Matt said to Brandon through a mouthful of omelet.

Brandon looked up from his food to see Matt's face. Brandon swallowed his food before he responded. "This was actually my first time flying, but yes, I did enjoy the view, and the food is definitely awesome."

Matt grunted in agreement because his mouth was too full of food to talk. The conversation died down for a moment as they continued to eat their food.

When they had eaten their fill, the class left the hotel to board the bus. As Brandon was boarding the bus, a black limo with tinted windows caught his attention as it turned a corner across the street.

Brandon thought that it was very odd that the car didn't have normal license plates. The plates had no letters or numbers on them—just a small, strange-looking symbol. That was all he saw before the limo disappeared behind a building.

Brandon stood there for a second, trying to figure out what the symbol had been. Then Matt tapped him on the shoulder and pointed at the bus. Everyone was waiting for Brandon to get on the bus. Brandon forgot about the limo as he sat down. Then the bus began to move.

A short time later, the class followed Mr. Clark into the lobby of the museum. The lobby was spacious and inviting. There was a model of planet Earth and some displays of animals. The class gathered in the middle of the room to wait for their tour guide to arrive.

While Brandon waited in the lobby, a black limo with tinted windows came to a stop in the Smithsonian's parking lot. The driver hopped out of the car and opened the back door. A tall man with short dark hair stepped out of the car. His name was Steve, and he wore an expensive-looking suit and a hardened expression on his face. Steve looked down at the gold watch on his left wrist.

It was just past 9:00 a.m. He had just enough time to take a quick look around the museum before he needed to make an important call. Steve looked up from his watch and said to the driver, "I'm going to be a while. You can do what you want for now. I'll call you when I need you."

"Yes, sir," the driver said.

Steve entered the museum. As he walked through the halls, he ignored all of the displays. He was not there to enjoy the sights and have a fun time. There was something else on his mind. His purpose was to track down a possible information leak. Somewhere in this museum, there was a person who knew something that he or she shouldn't.

Steve had spent the last few days tracking down the culprit. A few hours ago, he had learned that the person he was looking for worked for the Smithsonian. He was not sure who the person was or what he or she was after. Whatever the case was, Steve needed to find the person, no matter the cost. That information could do untold damage to the Lords and the peace of the world if the wrong people learned of it.

It did not take long for their guide to show up. Tom looked like he was in his mid-twenties. He seemed very nervous to Brandon. He seemed to emit fear and dread. For a moment, Brandon wondered why Tom would be afraid. Then an idea came to him: Tom must be nervous because he was a new tour guide.

Brandon stopped wondering about it as Tom looked at the class and said, "Are we ready to begin?"

When Mr. Clark nodded, Tom said, "Okay, then, follow me." Tom started to walk down a hallway to the right of the lobby entrance.

When they came to the first display, Brandon and Matt were awestruck. A giant twenty-five-foot-tall T. Rex skeleton stood in the middle of the new room. Matt mouthed a silent wow, and Brandon felt excitement spread through the other students. Everyone was feeling the same thing: amazement that this creature had really been alive many millions of years ago.

Tom started out by explaining the displays of the prehistoric animals that surrounded them. "Over the eons, life on Earth has taken many different forms. As the fossils of past animals show us, life will find a way to survive and, in most cases, thrive. For instance, the dinosaurs ruled Earth over sixty-five million years ago.

"This was known as the Mesozoic era, or the age of reptiles, which lasted for more than 251 million years. It is theorized that most of the larger species went extinct when a large comet struck Earth. But not all of them went extinct. Some

of them survived the event, and over time their descendants evolved into modern reptiles or birds and other animals,” Tom said.

Tom indicated another display. “This is a depiction of a velociraptor, a species that is believed to be the predecessor to modern birds. Notice the row of feathers around the arms. Archeologists believe that it had feathers so it could glide from tree to tree. As it spotted its prey below the trees, it would glide down and capture it,” Tom said.

Brandon stared at the display of the velociraptor. At first glance, it looked like a six-foot-tall chicken, with long arms and a lot of feathers. Upon closer inspection, however, he noticed the sharp teeth meant for ripping flesh. If it were still living today, it would be a terrifying predator.

Tom moved to a new display and continued to speak. “A group of mammals lived alongside the dinosaurs. It is believed that these small mammals, just a little bigger than modern rodents, survived and evolved into many other mammal species that are still around today. This is a display of one of those mammals.”

As they continued through the exhibits, all of the different shapes and sizes that life had taken amazed Brandon. It seemed that life was capable of almost anything when it was pushed to its limits. He wondered what had pushed humanity to become the way it was. The journey to be human must have been one difficult struggle, Brandon thought.

Brandon snapped out of his thoughts when Mr. Clark said, “It would appear that it is almost time for lunch. Let’s wrap this up and head to the cafeteria for a forty-five-minute lunch break. We’ll finish the rest of the tour after lunch.”

Tom nodded to Mr. Clark and said, “Okay, then. I’ll meet you in the lobby when you’re done.” With that, they all headed for lunch.

Steve opened the door to an empty office and walked inside. He had been walking around the museum for the last three hours, searching for an employee who looked suspicious. So far, he had turned up nothing. The person he was looking for knew how to hide any tracks. It frustrated Steve that he had been unable to discover anything about the leak.

Even his ability to use warp had been of no use to him. For most of the day, he had been feeling a slight pressure in the back of his head. It came and went. At first, he had thought that someone had been using warp, since the feeling was almost continuous. After a while, though, he realized that it was too weak to be someone who had the ability to manipulate the spirit field.

In the end, he decided that stress must be getting to him. He sighed. His head was starting to hurt. He rubbed his aching forehead. This situation was going to be harder to fix than he thought.

Reluctantly, Steve pulled a cell phone out of his pocket. He did not want to make this call, but it had to be done. Steve put the phone to his ear and listened. The phone rang four times before a cold, machinelike voice answered. "Hello, Steve. What have you found out?"

"Hello, Father. I'm sorry to say that I've been unable to find the leak. This is going to take longer than I thought. Somehow, he is evading me, but I will find him. I know he's here; I can feel it," Steve said.

There was a small pause before Father responded in a kind voice. "I think you're right; he has to be there somewhere. It can't be a coincidence that a tour is being given in that same museum to a group of the most promising warp candidates we've seen in years. He could be after one of those kids. I recommend that you keep an eye on them. If the leak gets to them before us, it could become problematic for the world."

Steve paused a moment to think. It made sense that the man they sought would be after warp candidates. The leak could do all kinds of damage with the information he had. Steve

would need to move fast if he wanted to prevent this leak from destroying the peace of the world.

It was time to get back to work. "Thank you, Father. I will follow your advice. As always, you are on top of things. You have no need to worry. I will take care of this as quickly as possible," Steve said.

"Good. Call me when you've caught the leak," Father said. A second later, the line went dead.

Steve put the phone in his pocket. He sighed in relief. That had gone better than he had thought it would. He was glad that Father was a reasonable man and was always willing to give Steve the benefit of the doubt. Steve had trusted Father's judgment ever since Father had saved him from the Lords when he was a kid. At least now, he had another lead to pursue. Steve left the small office and went back to searching the museum for the leak.

Brandon was walking down a sunlit path. The road stretched on and on. It felt like he had been traveling for years down this road. He did not know where he was going or what was at the end of this road. All he knew was that he had to find out. A weird force was driving him forward.

In the distance, he saw something strange in the middle of the path. As he drew closer, it looked like a brick wall that stretched to infinity in every direction. He came to a stop in front of the wall. It was made of what looked like solid stone bricks. Brandon raised his hand and laid it on the wall. He pressed as hard as he could, but the bricks did not even budge.

Unsure of what to do, he just stood there with his hand on the wall. This got old after a while, so he sat down in front of the wall. Brandon glared at the wall, still determined to move forward. "How do I get past this wall?" he asked himself. He did not expect to receive an answer.

After a while, he started to hear a low whisper that sounded almost like a summer breeze. It steadily grew louder. Soon it

became loud enough for Brandon to hear what sounded like words. "I can help you get through this wall. All you have to do is follow my lead. But you may not like what you find on the other side. Ha-ha-ha-ha," the strange voice whispered in his ear.

Brandon woke up with a start. He was drenched in sweat. What a strange dream! He looked at the clock on the hotel wall and saw that it was three in the morning. For a moment, he thought about the dream and tried to figure out what it was about. It was a confusing dream, but it seemed important somehow. After a time, he gave up and lay down in his bed again.

When morning finally arrived, Brandon woke up feeling fresh and renewed. It felt as if there was something new in the air. Feeling very energetic, he was ready for anything. During breakfast, he reviewed some notes about what he had learned yesterday. After breakfast, the class gathered outside the hotel to take a bus back to the Smithsonian.

It was the fourth day of the tour, and they had moved onto the world culture section of the museum. Their tour guide Tom met the class in the lobby of the second museum, and they started their tour. As Brandon walked with his class, he started to notice a slight buzzing in his ears. He thought that it was just an insect or something that he couldn't see, so he ignored it. After a while, he became too interested in the tour to notice the noise anymore.

Tom stopped the class in front of a display of a city. "This is a depiction of Sumerian culture. The Sumerian civilization is one of the earliest known civilizations. They were a society that mainly subsisted on grains and other crops. They thrived for many thousands of years and developed many advancements in technology. We owe them for a great many things such as writing. Some of their technologies were lost to the mists of time when the culture was forced to disband across the Middle East, because the land was no longer able to support them.

Sumerian culture would later develop into other cultures, like Babylon and Assyria,” Tom said.

Tom led them to a display of a giant tower. It was a square pyramid with tiers at regular intervals and some kind of rectangular building on top. Tom pointed to the display and said, “This is a depiction of the Tower of Babel. It is believed that the people of Babylon built this structure. Some ancient sources say that the structure reached into the heavens.

“It’s believed that the Babylonians built this tower to impress their gods and to declare themselves rulers of the world. We will never know for sure why it was built, because the Babylonian civilization collapsed. During the collapse, they lost large parts of their history. So we don’t know very much about it,” Tom said.

A short time later, the class headed off to lunch. Matt and Brandon sat next to each other. Brandon was thinking about the Tower of Babel. Somewhere at the back of his mind, he had felt a sense of déjà vu when he looked at the tower. It was as though he had seen it before—almost as if he had actually been there. Brandon’s thoughts were interrupted when Mr. Clark called everyone to attention. He said the class would have a three-hour free period to look at the exhibits on their own.

Brandon and Matt walked around the museum together, talking about what they had learned. After several hours, they had seen nearly everything on display for the second time. At this point, Brandon said, “I want to take another look at the Tower of Babel really quick.”

“We already saw that one,” Matt said. “Besides, we only have fifteen minutes left of our free time. Let’s go to the displays on ancient Rome instead.”

“I know that we already saw it. I just want to take another look at it. There’s something about that tower that I want to check out. It reminds me of something,” Brandon said.

Matt shook his head and said, "If you want to go back and look at the tower, go ahead. I'm going to take a look at Rome. That tower is just not as interesting as the Colosseum."

"Okay, then. I'll go alone. I'll see you back at the lobby when it's time to go," Brandon said. With that, the boys parted ways.

Brandon stood in front of the Tower of Babel. A question came to Brandon's mind as he looked at the tower. What had happened to make this place fall apart? It seemed odd that such an advanced civilization could fall apart so easily. Something really strange must have happened.

A voice that came from behind Brandon broke him out of his thoughts. "I see that you're interested in the Tower of Babel. This is the second time that I've seen you looking at it. Is there something that you want to know about it?" Tom asked.

Brandon paused for a moment to think about what he wanted to ask Tom. "Babylon was a culture that thrived around three thousand years ago. They were a very advanced culture. If they had the capability to build a giant tower, why did it fall apart? What happened to the Tower of Babel?" Brandon asked.

Tom smiled. "Well, that's a hard question to answer. The collapse of a civilization is a broad topic and can sometimes be hard to understand. In this case, it is believed that Babylon fell due to outside influence. They were unable to fight back against the cultures that surrounded them, due to technological differences.

"Babylon had been conquered several times by different cultures. Every time, the new cultures changed things within Babylonian culture. The pressure of all of the different cultures began to affect how the government of Babylon worked. At the end of its days, Babylon was unable to stand, due to the many differences in culture and language. Babylon ended up disbanding, and its people moved on to other places," Tom said.

Brandon listened intently. It was all starting to become clear, but something still bugged him. "You said earlier that no

one knows that much about the Tower of Babel. It seems odd to me that they built it just before Babylon collapsed. Did the tower have something to do with Babylon's fall?" Brandon asked.

Tom was silent for a minute. "You ask a lot of interesting questions. You're a very inquisitive kid. You're going to go far in life. As I said before, there is a lot that archeology hasn't been able to explain. So I can't give you a solid, factual answer about why the tower was actually built."

There was a short but noticeable pause before Tom added, "That being said, I do know something about the tower that may interest you. I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I like you. A few days ago, I saw some documents that spoke of a new theory. This theory isn't public knowledge yet, so I'd appreciate it if you don't tell anyone about it. According to this new theory, Babylon really fell because of a group called the Lords. I'm not entirely sure who these Lords are, but it sounded like they were some kind of cult that existed in secret. I don't know if this theory is true, but it sure is interesting, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is very interesting. I think it would be cool if it turned out to be true," Brandon said.

"I'm glad to see young kids so interested in history. It's refreshing to know that there are still people who care about the past," Tom said.

As Brandon looked back at the Tower of Babel, lost in thought, something sparked in his head. He started to hear the buzzing noise again. This time, though, the noise was much louder. Just as it was becoming unbearable, the buzzing noise became clear. Brandon started to hear voices. One of them sounded like Tom's, but it couldn't have been his voice, since his mouth was closed. Brandon looked at Tom in confusion.

Tom was lost in thought about the document he'd seen and did not notice Brandon's confusion. He wondered if he should tell Brandon what else he had learned from the document. The Lords were not normal men. They had a strange ability called "warp," which had somehow allowed them to control large segments of Babylon's government. During their rise to power,

the Lords had caused huge problems for Babylon. They were the reason why Babylon fell.

The last thing that Tom had read in the document scared him the most: the Lords were apparently still around today. That was the main reason that Tom was reluctant to tell Brandon more. The Lords sounded like a ruthless cult that would do anything to keep their power. He was afraid that it could get the two of them in big trouble.

Brandon stared silently at Tom. Tom had not said a word of that aloud, but somehow Brandon had heard and understood every word of Tom's thoughts. What was going on? It was time to get some real answers. "I have one last question for you. Were these Lords able to do strange things with their minds? Like hear people's thoughts?" Brandon asked.

Tom's mouth fell open as the last word left Brandon's lips. Tom closed his mouth a second later to try to cover up his reaction. Was this kid for real? Brandon seemed to know far more than a normal kid his age knew. Tom was unsure how to react to this situation. He could end up putting Brandon in big trouble if he revealed too much to him.

Brandon had been following along with everything that Tom was thinking. This was the answer that Brandon was looking for. He was, in fact, reading Tom's mind, and somehow that ability was linked to this group called the Lords.

This made Brandon very scared. Were the Lords somehow responsible for his ability to read people's thoughts? It was definitely possible. The Lords sounded like a very dangerous group of people. Brandon decided it would be best to keep this strange mind-reading ability to himself until he understood it better.

"I haven't heard anything about strange abilities. I don't know that much about the Lords, but mind reading is something from the realm of science fiction and fantasy, not real life. Stuff like that holds no relevance to the history of the world," Tom said. He hoped that his nervousness couldn't be heard in his voice.

Brandon decided that it was time to drop the subject. “Yeah, that does sound like science fiction. It was just a strange thought I had. Just forget I said anything.” Brandon smiled and gave a small chuckle.

Tom sighed in relief. He was off the hook for the moment. Tom looked down at his watch and then said, “By the way, isn’t it getting close to the time that your group will be boarding the buses? You should get going, or you’ll be late.”

Brandon looked at the clock on the wall. “You’re right—it is time for us to be getting ready to leave. I guess time just flies when you’re having fun, right?” he said with a small laugh. Then he walked toward the front of the museum, where the other kids from his school were gathering.

Tom watched silently as Brandon walked away. He was glad that Brandon had not pressed him any further for answers. This was going to be a difficult situation to deal with. He wished that he had never heard about the Lords. He would need to be very careful; otherwise, he could end up in big trouble. Tom was startled out of his thoughts as a man in an expensive suit stopped right in front of him.

Steve looked at the tour guide’s badge for a second to find out who he was. He could tell that something strange was going on and Tom was at the center of it. A moment ago Steve had thought that he had felt something from that kid—almost like the kid was using warp—but when Steve had tried to focus on him, it was like he was shrouded in mist. It seemed like someone was using warp to cover something up.

Steve wondered if Tom had somehow used warp. If he had, he would have to be very powerful to be covering it like that. In a cold voice, Steve said, “You look nervous, Tom. Is it because you’re trying to hide a secret that you’re not supposed to know?”

Tom looked a little frightened by the question. “What are you talking about? I don’t have any secrets. Who are you?” Tom asked in a quiet voice.

Steve knew that Tom was acting too scared and evasive. It was clear that Tom was trying to hide something. Tom must be the man that he was looking for. Steve decided to take Tom in for questioning. He pulled out his phone and texted for backup.

Steve put his phone back in his pocket and said to Tom, "I would like you to come with me so I can ask you some questions. I think you know more than you're letting on. If my guess is correct, you are the leak that I'm looking for. You've learned about the Lords by accident, correct?"

Sweat started to bead on Tom's forehead. He knew that he was in big trouble now. It seemed that the Lords had found out that he knew something that he shouldn't. He hoped that he could get out of this jam by playing innocent. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've never heard of the Lords. Is that some kind of cult? Anyway, I don't have time for this. I have to finish some paperwork in my office." His voice sounded quiet and nervous.

Steve smiled at Tom. There was no question that Tom was the one he was looking for. "I'm no longer asking you. You will come with me, Tom. As for your paperwork, I'm sure that someone else can take care of it," Steve said.

Tom started to look worried. His eyes darted about the room as he looked for a way to escape. "I don't know who you are. Why should I come with you?" Tom said in a low whisper.

"You may not know who I am, but you do know why I'm here. That's why you're coming with me," Steve said.

Tom's fear was starting to get the better of him, but he wasn't ready to give up yet. "You're not a cop. You have no authority over me," Tom said, trying to put as much strength in his voice as he could.

Steve pulled a badge out of his pocket and held it in Tom's face. "This is all the authority I need. Now, do what I say, or you will regret it." There was an edge to his voice.

Tom looked at the badge and flinched. It had a picture of a gold tower with six points on it casting a shadow over the world.

There were three letters engraved on it: EUP. It looked like some kind of government seal. He had seen the symbol before when he had first read about the Lords. Tom said nothing and looked at the floor. He was not sure what to do anymore.

“That’s what I thought. Now, if you will follow me, we’ll finish this conversation in a better location,” Steve stated with complete control and authority. Five others showed up just then and surrounded Tom. “Don’t mind them; they’re here for your protection,” Steve said with a smile on his face.

It was the fifth day of their tour. The class was beginning the tour of the air and space museum. The students were very excited about this part of the trip. They would now be looking at modern times. The class was currently waiting in the lobby.

While Brandon waited for Tom to show up, he happened to look off to the side, and a new display caught his eye. Hiding in one corner of the lobby was an old blue box that looked like some kind of phone booth. It said police call box at the top, and it looked kind of beat up. Brandon wondered why it was there. It looked out of place in this part of the museum.

While Brandon looked at the blue box, gray-haired woman who looked to be about fifty walked up to the class. “Hello, everybody! My name is Judy, and I will be your tour guide this morning,” she said with enthusiasm.

A student named Edward asked her why Tom wasn’t there.

“I’m sorry, but Tom is feeling a little under the weather today. Now, let’s get started, shall we?” Judy said.

Brandon tried to enjoy the tour of the museum, but he was preoccupied by the fact that Tom was not their guide anymore. He had enjoyed Tom’s tours more than he liked Judy’s. Tom seemed to be more excited and in touch with his job. Judy did not seem to care as much about the displays.

Brandon quickly lost interest in Judy’s tour. In his boredom, he took to trying to read Judy’s mind with his strange new

abilities. He was only able to understand Judy's thoughts on the next few sections of the tour. The rest was mostly nonsense to Brandon.

This new ability was so strange. It was very hard to control. Brandon decided to stop trying to use it for the moment and worry about it later. He went back to focusing on the tour. In short order, the class finished the tour and went back to the lobby to wait for the bus.

Brandon grew bored with waiting and looked around the lobby. He looked in the corner where he had seen the blue box earlier. For some reason, the box wasn't there anymore. He decided that the staff must have moved it to some other part of the museum. He quickly forgot about the blue box as the bus arrived and took them back to the hotel.

Brandon was sitting at his desk in class. It had been several days since the trip to the Smithsonian. Everyone had finally finished their essays, and today, their teacher would announce who had won the essay contest.

Matt sat at the desk next to Brandon's. "What did you write about? I wrote about what would happen if the dinosaurs had not gone extinct and were still alive today. Life on Earth would be so different if they had continued to live. They may have even developed into their own kind of civilization," Matt said.

"That's such a cool idea. I wish I had come up with it. My essay is just about how societies evolve over time," Brandon said.

Brandon and Matt talked for a few more minutes until Mr. Clark stood up from his desk and asked for quiet. "You have written some really thought-provoking essays. If it were up to me, I would give you each a prize, but there can only be one winner. I would like to congratulate Lenard as the winner. Lenard had the best-organized and most factual essay. Lenard's essay was on the natural evolution of life," Mr. Clark said.

ADAM HITZ

Mr. Clark pulled out a box and set it on Lenard's desk. "Your prize is this plaster cast of a raptor claw," he said as he pulled the claw out of the box and handed it to Lenard. Mr. Clark then started clapping his hands. The whole class joined in. Brandon clapped his hands along with the other students. He was not upset that he had lost. It would have been cool if he had won, but he still had had plenty of fun at the museum. A moment later, the bell rang, and the class was dismissed for the day.